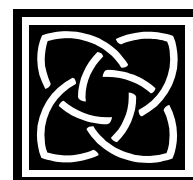




Appleby Archaeology Newsletter



Volume 14 Issue 3 : Autumn 2011

Group News

New Arrangements at NPA

Your Committee became very alarmed earlier this summer when it learnt that North Pennines Archaeology might be disbanded. As many of you will know, Appleby Archaeology has always enjoyed close links with NPA. Fortunately, matters have now been satisfactorily resolved. Martin Railton writes as follows:

“as a result of the financial instability of the North Pennines Heritage Trust, North Pennines Archaeology Ltd has now ceased trading. However a new company, NP Archaeology Ltd has been formed as a subsidiary company of Wardell Armstrong LLP. All of the staff from North Pennines Archaeology have been kept in employment and it is hoped that the new company will maintain close ties to Cumbria.”

Naturally we are all very relieved for Martin. We are confident that NP Archaeology, as we must now learn to call it, will flourish under its new management.

Summer Activities

Elsewhere, I think it's fair to say that this has been one of the Group's best summers for some years. The outings to Rayseat and Barrow were extremely well-attended and the excavation on the Maiden Way was also well-supported. For details, read on.

And now, since the Autumn is now decidedly upon us, may I say that I look forward to seeing you again at the new season's lecture programme.

Best wishes, Martin Joyce

Evening Walk to Rayseat Pike

Appleby Archaeology's first evening walk of the summer took place on the summer solstice. So, given our track record, you can imagine what the weather forecast was like. Nevertheless, at least a dozen members

assembled at the draughty cattle-grid near Mazon Wath, warily contemplating the shower clouds massed ominously in the distance.

In actual fact the worst that happened was that a particularly vicious gust caught my best sun-hat as I got out of the car. The pristine white cotton flew quite some distance and landed in a puddle where it slowly sank. Nobody else seemed at all dismayed by this and so the party obediently set off, following their dripping guide across the rough moorland.

The cairn was a gratifying surprise to many. It really is quite surprisingly large. There's quite a lot about it in Tom Clare's "Prehistoric Monuments of Cumbria" so I was able to tell the group about some of the burial structures that had been found underneath the "entrance" end of the cairn. We'd only just received details of the Bronze Age "cremation monument" on Brackenber (the one that was meant to be a Roman Signal Station), so we couldn't help pondering some of the similarities. Here's a photograph:



Eastern end of Rayseat Long Cairn, courtesy of www.themodernantiquarian.com

Our
next
port

of call was a tiny stone "circle" overlooking Sunbiggin Tarn. Since this comprised no more than a dozen large pebbles hidden in the bracken I was staggered to find that everybody agreed this was worth seeing too. I can only conclude that some members lead very sad lives.

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Anyway, we finished up at Gamelands, as advertised, just as the sun was beginning to set behind clouds that now looked as if they meant serious business. This circle is the real deal. I was very conscious of the fact that, although the large granite boulders are no longer in their original upright positions, they are so resilient that they probably look much as they did when they were first dragged to the site. I was also very taken with an idea I'd picked up from "Prehistoric Monuments", namely that the site of the circle might have been chosen because it contained a spring. Since the rain had now finally arrived we made a rapid retreat before the spring could put in a re-appearance.

The only disappointment was that nobody seemed prepared to enter into the spirit of the mid-summer solstice. Sadly, there were no antlers or druidic horns. Raincoats remained firmly buttoned. We must all be getting old.

Still, it had been a very enjoyable way of spending a damp summer solstice.

Martin Joyce

Altogether Archaeology : Excavating the Maiden Way Roman Road

The Maiden Way runs from Kirby Thore (Bravoniacum), northwards past the villages of Milburn and Kirkland, across Melmerby Fell to Whitley Castle, eventually meeting the Stanegate Roman road at Carvoran (Magnis). It is thought that the road may have been constructed to facilitate lead and silver mining on Alston Moor, although evidence for this is still to be recovered. The Maiden Way was first described in detail by Reginald Bainbridge who published a description of its entire length (from north to south) in 1855. Very little archaeological investigation has been conducted along the course of the road*.

In July this year, members of Appleby Archaeology group supervised by staff from North Pennines Archaeology carried out an excavation on behalf of the North Pennines AONB Partnership. The purpose of the project was to investigate the Maiden Way Roman Road as it passes near the impressive and well-preserved Whitley Castle Roman Fort near Alston.

Despite torrential rain, the project was well-supported by volunteers and, over the course of nine consecutive days, three trenches were excavated to investigate the nature and condition of the Roman road. A nearby Bastle house was kindly provided by Elaine Edgar of Whitlow Farm as a site hut and this was a welcome shelter from the worst of the rain. It was testament to the commitment of the volunteers that despite the weather no one gave up on the project!

The first trench was positioned over a section of the road which was visible as a low earthwork crossing a field to the south of the fort. The road was revealed as a classic cambered road surface of large sandstone slabs with ditches either side (see below).

The second trench was positioned on higher ground to the west, close to where the road may have crossed a stream bed. Again, a stone surface was revealed with a ditch on the north (uphill) side. There was no



Section through Maiden Way showing sandstone metalling

sign of a ditch on the south side of the road, but it is thought that this would have been unnecessary since the ground sloped downhill on this side of the road and would have been free-draining. Interestingly a later field bank was constructed on the north side of this road section, and part of the ditch here had been in-filled to create a stone causeway. This may be evidence for the later re-use of the road for post-medieval mining or farming activity.

The final trench was positioned to investigate an eroded section of the road where it crossed the stream bed. It was hoped that this might reveal evidence for a bridge abutment, but this was not present. Rather, it seemed that the road had been disturbed by later flood events.

This work contributed to a larger English Heritage project, focusing on Whitley Castle Roman fort, which has included detailed topographic survey, geophysical survey, aerial photography and LIDAR survey. It will also serve to inform the management of

the site under Natural England's Higher Level Steward-



The volunteers in action!

ship Scheme. It is hoped that further excavation and survey work will be undertaken in the near future over the entire course of the Maiden Way as part of the North Pennines AONB Altogether Archaeology Project. Elaine Edgar is also hoping to develop a visitor centre at the site, so if you haven't yet been to visit Whitley Castle I would encourage you to do so. It is certainly one of the most impressive Roman earthworks in the UK!

Martin Railton

* Editor's note. Martin Railton was kind enough to remind me that there was in fact at least one co-ordinated investigation of the Maiden Way prior to this summer's excavations. This was carried out in the 60's by Carlisle Grammar School under the supervision of Tullie House Museum. Excavation notes were found in the possession of (cough, cough) one M. Joyce Esq.

AppArch Summer visit to Furness

On July 10th, 14 members assembled at Broad Close car park in Appleby, eager to set off on the grand trip to Furness. Our jovial driver soon had us on the road heading off into parts of Cumbria with which many of us were no longer particularly familiar. Consequently, as we approached the Dock Museum, the redevelopment of the Barrow Docks neighbourhood into an industrial/retail dis-

trict came as quite a surprise.

Nestled in the midst of this area, with the looming presence of the BAe Systems submarine assembly building close by, stands the Dock Museum, our first port of call.

The museum is built into the old graving dock and con-



The Dock Museum, Barrow

tains a number of different display areas. At the entrance level we discovered the area devoted to the history of Barrow itself, a 19th century planned town, which overwhelmed the original village when large scale iron ore deposits were discovered nearby. The iron and steel industry grew up extremely quickly, and was soon followed by the Furness Railway. In turn, the first superintendent of the railway became the driving force behind the nascent shipbuilding industry. This part of the museum even-handedly explains the sometimes less than laudable social history of the town as well as the efforts of the great and the good.

Inside the graving dock, a magnificent suspended floor houses some wonderful ship models together with a collection of memorabilia celebrating the shipbuilding industry. On the lowest level, the old dock floor, stands a cinema and we were delighted to find a collection of old films on display covering many aspects of the history of Barrow, including one on our next destination, Furness Abbey.

Before setting off, most of us decided to have lunch at the excellent café, a good choice as it turned out because (for future reference) the facilities at the Abbey are limited to a coffee machine, biscuits and ice cream.

After a jolly but unscheduled tour of the environs of Barrow, our driver being unsure of his way, we finally manoeuvred our way along the narrow road leading down to the Abbey.

Furness Abbey is a magnificent red sandstone ruin lo-

cated in a gentle valley - a mixed blessing because, although delightfully romantic, it's also a marsh. This, inevitably, presented the original builders with some considerable engineering challenges.

Brother John, in modern clothing instead of his usual cowl and habit, showed us around the remains and proved the worth of someone who really knows their subject. He had a wealth of information about the Abbey and the inhabitants and shared his knowledge with us in a friendly way. Much better than any guide book.

After browsing in the small museum, we set off once again on the road to Appleby, making a slight diversion to a pleasant garden centre at Halecat, where a number of members took advantage of a welcome opportunity to buy plants, drink tea etc.



The ruins of Furness Abbey

The general consensus amongst the members was that the trip had been a very pleasant full day outing, and both locations are highly recommended to any members who are daring enough to venture into Furness on their own.

Richard Stevens



Autumn/Winter Programme

2010 Excavations at Papcastle, Cockermouth

Tuesday 13th September

Mark Graham
Grampus Heritage

Hornby Castle - recent excavations

Tuesday 11th October

Eric Matthews

Archaeological Landscape Survey of the Sizergh Estate

Tuesday 8th November

Jamie Lund
National Trust NW Region

Cumbrian Connections : Lithic analysis in the Upper Eden Valley

Tuesday 13th December

Annie Hamilton-Gibney

Annie will also bring us up to date on the "Living among the Monuments" project

AGM and Members' Evening

7.00pm Tuesday 10th January

Martin Railton : Altogether Archaeology on Brackenber Moor - Results of the 2011 Excavations at the "Roman Signal Station"

Richard Stevens : More on Abbeytown - an outlying chapel at Holme St. Cuthbert



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